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Color mania – exhibiting the materiality of color in film and photography

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By Dr. Eva Hielscher, SNF Agora Project *Presentation and Visualization of Historical Film Colors*, University of Zurich, and guest curator at Fotomuseum Winterthur.

Since June 2018, the *Film Colors* projects ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21207.htm>) and SNSF *Film Colors* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p21276.htm>) of the University of Zurich have further been growing by the start of a new sub-project. *Presentation and Visualization of Historical Film Colors* (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p22754.htm>), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation as Agora project (<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/science-communication/agora/Pages/default.aspx>). It aims to present the research and findings of the *Film Colors* teams to a broader audience and introduce the public to the intriguing and multifaceted theme of historical film colors. The center of this project, which will comprise a number of different presentation formulae, forms an exhibition currently being developed in collaboration with Fotomuseum Winterthur (<https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/>) about the materiality, aesthetics and technologies of historical film colors and contemporary photography.

Color Mania – The Material of Color in Photography and Film (https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/exhibitions/155768_colour_mania_the_material_of_colour_in_photography_and_film) will present a great number of different film color processes from the course of film history, while also looking at these historical techniques through the lens of present-day photographers and artists. Both the

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Color Mania – Exhibiting the Materiality of Color in Film and Photography
 Beauty and workings of color in film and photography will be highlighted in thematic clusters, merging thus an aesthetic string with a line of technological aspects of color practices and processes. The aesthetic side comprises the attraction of the analogue film material itself and analogue colors in film and photography. In this regard, the exhibition will pay homage to the materiality of color, film and photography and engage in discussions about digitization and current forms of colors in digital-born film and photography.



*Preparation of the various samples for the exhibition, ordered by thematic clusters.
 Photo by Eva Hielscher.*

The exhibition, which is curated by Nadine Wietlisbach, director of Fotomuseum Winterthur, and myself, will run from September 7 to November 24, 2019.

Moreover, in combination and extension of the exhibition, there will be a film program at Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur (<https://www.kurzfilmtage.ch/EN>) in November this year, dedicated to historical film colors.



Material properties of the Friese-Greene process (<https://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1220/>). Kino the Girl of Colour (GB 1920, William Friese-Greene, Claude Friese-Greene). Credit: Courtesy of BFI National Archive. Photograph by Barbara Flueckiger.

From my personal perspective as a curator with a film archival and film historical background, this exhibition project is also extremely exciting since it touches upon – and, in a practical way, will take part in – the discourse of white cube and black box and the challenges, possibilities and added values of exhibiting moving images (and film colors!) in the exhibition space, merging elements of museum and movie theater. Since the integration of media art in museums in the 1990s, black box and white cube have become symbolic for the referenceless, white museum space (in which the visitor walks around) in contrast to the

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Fourth International Conference Colour in Film, London
 (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/12/21/cif2019/>)
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 (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/11/13/copyright-books/>)
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darkened auditorium of the movie theatre (in which the immobile audience watches moving images on the screen) and the convergence and combination of the two. Put differently, from a film exhibition perspective, the museum with its spatial characteristics allows to tell stories in a different way than the *dispositif* of cinema. In a kind of *open montage*, it encourages the museum visitor to create his/her own connections, associations, interpretations and meaning by moving around in the exhibition space and deciding which exhibits and elements to examine one after the other. While the routes through the exhibition can still be guided, this manner of multiple connections allows to tell several stories at the same time and create different narrative layers. This, indeed, is extremely interesting for the story of color materiality in film and photography as there are diverse facets, including aesthetic aspects, technological elements and institutional discourses, and the combination and interweaving of all these sub-narratives.



Reflection on Cinecolor (<https://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1297>) print.
Credit: Image courtesy of the 20th Century Fox Collection at the Academy Film Archive.
Photograph by Barbara Flueckiger

Further activities within Presentation and Visualization of Historical Film Colors (<http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p22754.htm>) include the development of a smartphone app connected to the Timeline of Historical Film Colors (<https://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/>) and a platform for film color analysis, workshops on coloring films manually through hand coloring and tinting, and an educational package for school teachers.



Silver mirroring in *Med Roald Amundsens nordpolsekspedition til første vinterkvarter* [Roald Amundsen's North Pole Expedition] (Norway 1923). Credit: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Photograph by Barbara Flueckiger.

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